

# LutheranWoman

March 2005

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## Readers Share Thoughts

**I WAS DELIGHTED TO READ IN THE OCTOBER 2004 ISSUE OF *LUTHERAN WOMEN TODAY* THAT *LWT* HAS BEEN RECOGNIZED FOR EXCELLENCE IN RELIGIOUS publishing.** Every month I read the magazine from cover to cover, do the Bible study, and clip and save favorite articles. I was amazed to discover that I have on file most of the articles that received awards in 2003. I clip Marj Leegard's devotional every month.

I particularly appreciate the themes that are presented and carried out in each issue around the Bible study. For example, the theme for the September Bible study was "God in the Everyday." We were vacationing in September and spent several days at the home of my sister-in-law. I had gotten up early and was having my quiet time while everyone else was still in bed. I finished the *LWT* Bible study and was reading an article titled "Grace for the Journey" by Sonia C. Solomonson when I suddenly was aware that I was not alone. Standing quietly at my feet was my sister-in-law's little dog, Sassie. I motioned for her to jump up onto my lap, and she quickly wedged herself into the space beside me in the chair. I continued my reading. A line from the article stood out: "Sometimes we live with hearts open to the everyday joys that surround us." I stopped reading and reflected on the words. Yes, indeed. God in the everyday joys. God in the quiet of that morning, God in the hospitality of my sister-in-law and, yes, God in the little dog peacefully sleeping at my side.

Congratulations upon winning these prestigious awards. Thank you for the many blessings you have provided to me for so many years.

—*Fay Coats, Othello, Wash.*

I just wanted to comment that I was surprised that after the statement, "We sin," in the fifth paragraph (which I totally agree with) I found it contradictory to say in the last paragraph, "If the invitation to the Eucharist were limited to the deserving, 'few would eat.'" Shouldn't that be "none" rather than "few"? None deserve the Eucharist.

Who does deserve the Eucharist? Definitely food for thought and our Bible study this evening.

Thank you for this magazine. It challenges me, and that is good!

—*Kelley Barnard, Olympia, Wash.*

We use the taped editions of *LWT* for our circle meeting because many of our members are hard of hearing and cannot hear each other read parts of the lesson. By turning up the volume of the tape, all can hear.

I also listen to these *LWT* tapes while I sew quilts for Lutheran World Relief. Because I spend more hours sewing than it takes to finish an *LWT* tape, I use the local library for my audio books.

—*Margaret S. Swanson, Redlands, Calif.*

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GIVE US THIS DAY

## Between Question and Answer

by Marj Leegard

**MARCH. THAT DESOLATE NOT-QUITE-SPRING MONTH** when Christmas has been packed away but the cold winds of winter still blow. No flower is so foolish as to bloom here in planting Zone 3. No snow is quite as raggedy and dirty as March snow banks. If it weren't for the calendar's promise of Easter morning, we could do very well without March. It is a time we must bear between cozy winter and exciting spring.

March is a waiting period, and we are not always patient about waiting. We have times in our lives between the asking and the blessing, between the question and the answer. Waiting is as much a part of faith as fulfillment. Some of God's blessings and answers will take more than the 31 days of March. Some answers may fall from the end of our time and be answered in eternity.

This waiting period is only dreary if we allow ourselves to live in grayness. March can be a month of open windows, breezy air, curtains billowing to music we cannot hear. The scatter rugs refresh themselves on the porch railing after the winter of hard work. We get a foretaste of summer in the first potato salad and shiver while we test the garden soil by squeezing a handful. Children pick tulips with half-inch stems and tightly folded petals, and their mothers accept these gifts with the same joy as they would long-stemmed roses.

These waiting periods in our lives come between question and answer, between need and blessing. The waiting can be refreshing, too. Perhaps our doubts are like the worn scatter rugs. Shake them

out, read Psalm 100, and sing along with David, as I have paraphrased his words:

Shout praises to the Lord, everyone on this earth. Be joyful and sing as you come in to worship the Lord! You know the Lord is God! God created us and we belong to God: We are God's people, the sheep in God's pasture. . . . Be thankful and praise the Lord as you enter God's temple. . . . The Lord is good! God's love and faithfulness will last forever.


We live in a world of impatient people. I once told my husband that our little daughter had the impatience of her grandmother. He said, "This may come as a shock to you, but impatience did not skip a generation." We want easy-to-clean, easy-to-cook, easy-to-store, *fast* solutions for everyday tasks. We want to buy a new house that is built, decorated, and partly furnished, and place it on our land. "Instant" we understand. "Wait" brings forth hostility.

There will be times of waiting. There will be times of questions without immediate answers. There will be needs that are not filled in the ways we thought appropriate or in the time frame we chose. These wintry March times are also blessed. God created us, and we belong to God. In pain and doubt and tears we can still sing, "The Lord is good! God's love and faithfulness will last forever."

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**LWT columnist Marj Leegard and her husband, Jerome, live in Detroit Lakes, Minn.**





# GIVE ALL THIS DAY THEIR DAILY BREAD

BY KATHRYN SIME

I could hardly wait to tell friends and family about my new job. I had been asked to serve as the director of the ELCA World Hunger and Disaster Appeal. It was a dream job: working for the church with a ministry that does such good things for so many people. Offering their congratulations,

many friends and relatives followed with an unexpected afterthought: "Won't it be depressing to hear all those stories about extreme hunger and poverty?" Good question. After nine months of living into my new role, I can better articulate my reaction to the tragedy of hunger in our world. Depress-

ing? Sometimes. Hopeful? Always. I can certainly understand those initial concerns about my new job. After all, statistics about domestic and international hunger and poverty are heartbreaking.

> Over 800 million children, women, and men around the



world are chronically hungry; they experience daily repeated, severe hunger.

- > Someone dies of hunger or hunger-related diseases every three seconds—about one person for each deep breath we take.
- > Each year, six million children under the age of five die of malnutrition.
- > In the United States, one in six Americans required some form of food assistance last year.

These numbing statistics are hard to comprehend. Most of us have never experienced real hunger. We all know the uncomfortable feeling of an empty stomach when our next meal is late. I'm embarrassed at the number of times I've complained "I'm starving!" when forced to wait an extra few minutes at a busy restaurant. But real hunger? Few of us have experienced it, and so the statistics and news about hunger in our world lull us into complacency. So, why am I hopeful? Because I've learned that we can eliminate hunger.

## FINDING THE BEGINNING OF THE END

Most of us assume that hunger is inevitable; that food scarcity means some will eat tonight and some will not. We've grown up

hearing about hungry children in the world and have accepted that hunger is just one of those terrible facts of life. But actually, writes the Rev. Craig L. Nesson of Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa, "the world currently produces enough grain to provide a diet of 3,500 calories a day for every human being on the planet." We have enough grain so that everyone could be sufficiently fed today. Even more amazing, when we include the wide variety of other foods available, everyone in the world could have 4.3 pounds of food to eat each day. Not only would we all be well fed, we all have enough food to make us fat.

My first reaction to Nesson's claim was: What a wonderful reminder of God's abundance. We don't live in a world of scarcity. Just as God's love for us exceeds understanding, the abundance of food in our world is far greater than I imagined.

But my second reaction was shame. What does the fact that six million children under age five will die needlessly of hunger this year say about us? That is a powerful indictment against humanity that I cannot assign to someone else. I cannot defer that shame to government officials or to global economic systems.

Knowing that my prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread," can be fulfilled not just for my family, but for all families everywhere compels me to take responsibility and action.

Moving from shame to action, however, requires acknowledgment that some of our previous assumptions about hunger may require updating. Offering "daily bread" to our hungry neighbors around the corner and the world may take different forms: tortillas, sewing machines, fairly traded coffee, family dinner table conversations, and e-mails to elected leaders are all paths toward eliminating hunger. Enlightening ourselves about hunger helps broaden our understanding on steps we can take to end it.

The World Hunger ministry of the ELCA has been taking this approach toward ending hunger for 30 years. Through relief, development, education, and advocacy, our church has played a role with other governmental and non-governmental partners in helping to decrease the overall amount of hunger in our world, although we still have miles to go. The four-pronged strategy of our world hunger ministry points out steps we can each take to join this fight against hunger.



# A FOUR-PRONGED STRATEGY TO FIGHT HUNGER

## ADVOCACY

Advocacy is not as scary or complicated as it sounds. We all practice it daily, for example, by advocating for wise financial decisions that allow us to give some of our money to help others. Additionally, we can ask our local, state, and federal officials to make wise policy and budget decisions that help alleviate poverty for people in this country and around the world. Getting the ear of government officials is easier now than ever, thanks to e-mail. Visit the ELCA advocacy Web site (and refer to the Action & Advocacy Guide on page 18 for this and other related information) to learn how to voice your concerns or issue compliments to your elected representatives through e-mail. I recently sent an e-mail thanking my representatives for their efforts in highlighting the humanitarian crisis in Sudan and urged them to take further action to end this tragedy.

## EDUCATION

It is all of our responsibilities to educate others about how they can help end hunger. The Lutheran church, spearheaded by the Women of the ELCA, exceeded a challenge to buy 90 tons of fairly traded coffee last year. If we continue to inform others about how purchasing fairly traded products can help farmers make enough money to meet life's daily needs, we are taking steps toward eliminating hunger. Perhaps we should challenge each other to break the habit of buying more than we truly need or have conversations about teaching our children the importance of understanding and confronting world hunger.

## DEVELOPMENT

Hunger relief programs alone will not end hunger; we must also examine ways to break the cycle of poverty that causes it. Women and children are the most common victims, and the developmental damage caused by severe hunger at birth is irreversible. Helping women gain skills to be self-sufficient enables them to feed themselves and their families for a lifetime. Many successful stories of development ministries exist. For example:

- Catherine Nebakalu of Uganda bought her first pig with a \$33 micro-loan from World Hunger partners. The investment represents the beginning of her financial independence.
- A sewing machine provided by World Hunger partners helped Hawa Bagum of Bangladesh get work that helped pay school fees for her children and set up her own savings account for the future.

## RELIEF

The relief model of hunger ministry is the one we all know best. We've probably all raided our cupboards for canned foods to support a local food pantry. Relief ministries are critical because they ease hunger pangs immediately. We see hunger relief programs throughout our church. For example:

- The mission church of Cristo Rey Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, provides supplementary food to its Hispanic neighbors on a weekly basis.
- The Meals on Wheels program of the Lutheran Church of Hope in Ramallah, West Bank, a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and Palestine, delivers meals to 62 Palestinians who are elderly, poor, or disabled.



## LIVING INTO A HOPEFUL FUTURE

Through relief, development, education and advocacy, Lutherans have helped change the lives of our neighbors—around the world and around the corner. Statistics about hunger are depressing, but other stories offer greater hope.

In Uganda, 11-year-old Monic witnessed the deaths of both her mother and father from AIDS last year. Left with no family, Monic had few resources for school fees. And without an education, she would find it difficult to escape the cycle of poverty that has such a tight grip on her life. However, thanks to the ELCA World Hunger Appeal, Monic and other orphaned schoolchildren receive assistance for tuition and uniforms. At school, they receive a good education and at least one good

meal each day. Our church helped change the life of this young girl and others like her. Because Monic has a future, I have hope.

Hannah, 9, of Nebraska also offers hope. She asked her grandmother for a birthday gift that would help other kids. So her grandmother made a donation to the ELCA World Hunger Appeal in Hannah's name. Hannah knows already what many of us will struggle a lifetime to learn—that the needs of the world outweigh our drive to consume and to own more stuff.

These young girls are my reminders of God's abundant love. Their stories, and those of Catherine and Hawa, compel me to look to the promise of the good news. Gifts to the World Hunger Appeal bring immediate comfort to people in poverty and crisis,

and in turn, enable our church to play a part in creating justice for those who lack the basics of life.

What ways can we end hunger? Pray without ceasing for daily bread and water for all who hunger and thirst. Give generously. Advocate for those who are unable to speak for themselves. And find hope in the knowledge that together, with God's help, we can end hunger.

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**Kathryn Sime is director of World Hunger and Disaster Appeal for the ELCA.**

## REFERENCES

All hunger statistics from *Are We On Track to End Hunger? Hunger Report 2004*. Bread for the World Institute, 2004.

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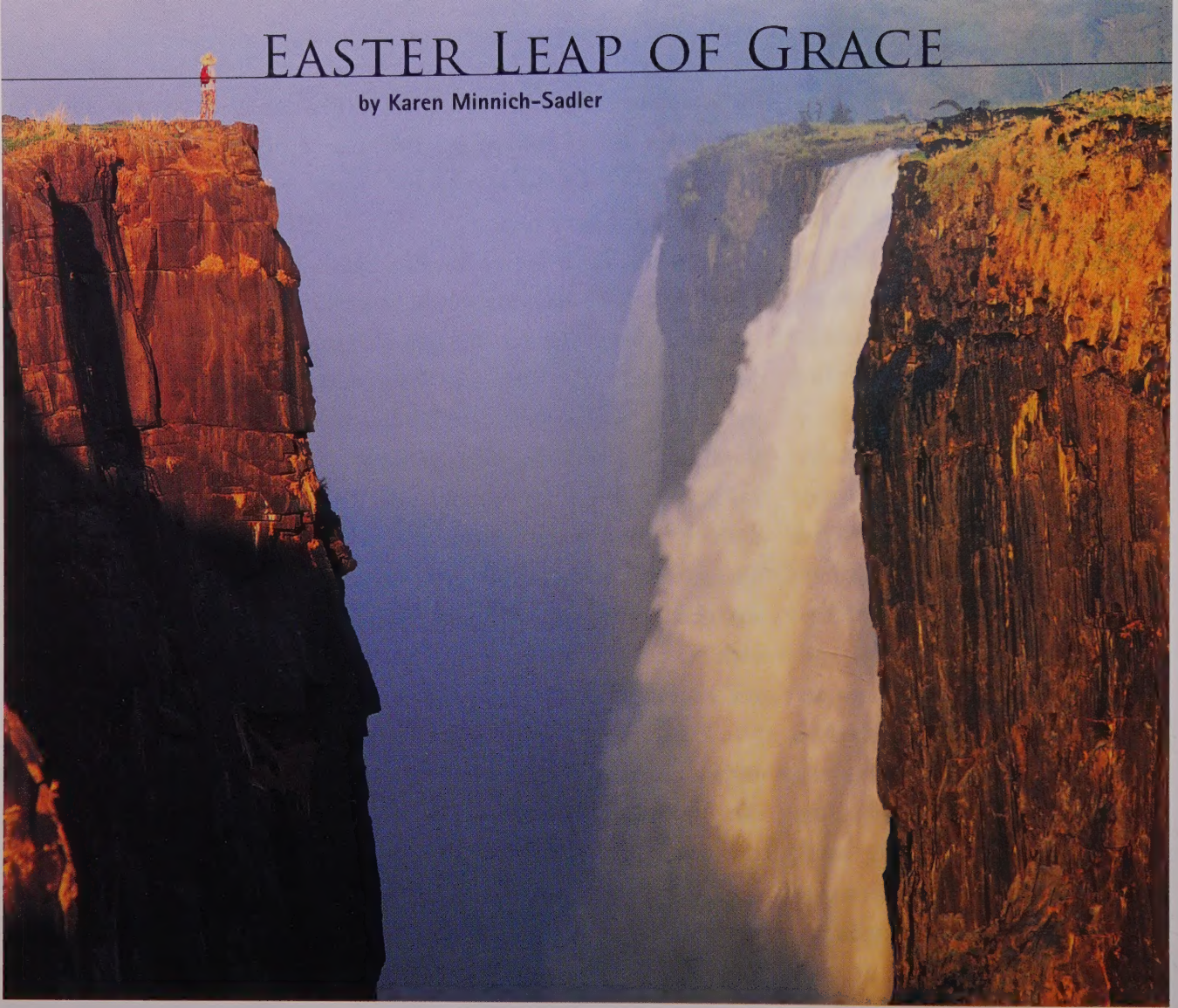
## YOU CAN HELP

Bring hope to those who hunger! Gifts to the ELCA World Hunger and Disaster Appeal may be sent through Women of the ELCA, P.O. Box 71256, Chicago IL 60694-1256. Make checks payable to "Women of the ELCA," then write "World Hunger" or "Disaster Relief" on the memo line. By offering your financial support in this way you highlight the impact of women in supporting the ministries of the church. Questions about your gifts through Women of the ELCA? Call Vanessa at 800-638-3522, ext. 2702.



# EASTER LEAP OF GRACE

by Karen Minnich-Sadler



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WHETHER WE LIVE ORDINARY LIVES OR LIVES EXTRAORDINARILY FAR FROM AVERAGE, IN THE EBB AND FLOW OF OUR EXISTENCE, WE OFTEN FIND THAT OUR CIRCUMSTANCES MIRROR THE CHASM THAT SEPARATES THE RICH MAN FROM LAZARUS. WHETHER THESE CHASMS ARE OF OUR OWN MAKING OR NOT MATTERS LITTLE. IF THEY ARE THERE, THEN WE MAY FEEL ALIENATED FROM GOD'S GRACE.

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But eventually we find that the chasms are no match for God. They can neither permanently isolate us nor determine our future. In the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God makes an astounding leap of grace over any distance that separates us and catches us up in an embrace of welcome, love, and mercy. As the love of Christ fills the chasms around us, we realize with profound relief that we who could see no way over the chasm have been given a bridge of solid rock. Our terrible sense of loneliness and alienation disintegrates as the hopelessness within is touched by the light of the resurrection morning.

The Easter event reverberates throughout time. The seasons come and go, and our lives are marked off in layers of days and years. Yet, whatever else the calendar tells us, we have, as God's people, experienced a new birth and beginning that neither time nor circumstances can alter.

It is tempting to link the renewal of spring with our own Easter story. The earth reawakens, and we sense that these new beginnings are signs of God's gracious presence. We know that without grace, nothing in this life could be sustained.

But the Easter event is far more than a mere reawakening. Christ actually died. In the resurrection, we see the astounding willingness

of God to bring new life where there is none. We plant our feet firmly on that promise—our lives linked to Jesus—and rejoice, for nothing in this life has the power to change what God has done and continues to do for us.

Easter is the season we celebrate being found; we celebrate God's claim upon our lives. Each day that we live is an Easter event as the amazing work of God in Christ continues to penetrate and transform the chaos and disruption of our lives. Again and again, we are given wholeness and healing and new life. It is an ongoing creation process, this work God does. It is a process that has its roots in the Easter story and that explodes out into time and distance—forward and backward—covering every part of human history. This means no part of our life is left untouched by the gracious work of God. What has been and ever shall be exists in the creating presence of the God who absolutely refuses to give up on the people who have been claimed and named as God's own.

There will be moments when we feel lost once again, stranded by the chasms that we see around us, when loneliness and longing seem to overtake our lives. When that happens, God's gentle, insistent tug on our hearts reminds us that we need not exist in such emptiness.

In Jesus Christ, there simply are no chasms. We are surrounded by the love and strength of God who has the power to leap over any chasm life creates. And for however long it is needed, God will hold us in safety so that we do not fall into the depths of it and will birth us into new life and hope once again.

In the Easter story, there is an affirmation that God will never tire of holding us in grace. Whatever else is true about us, this is far deeper and wider and has first claim: we are children of God, children of grace, and nothing else in our lives is more important than that foundational truth.

This Easter truth has the power to change our lives and to transform us. It is the ending and beginning and pivotal point of our personal stories. Whether our lives are chaotic or ordered, whether we are experiencing moments of peace or pain, we are covered by the grace of God who has the power to change what is.

Our lives are caught up in the creating mercy of Jesus Christ. Our lives are not determined by our chasms. We move and live and have our being in Jesus. That is grace; that is our Easter story.

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**Karen Minnich-Sadler is pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Biglerville, Pa.**



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## Answering the Call: C.A.R. Woman Engages World

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by Terri Lackey

One of Antoinette Beanzoui's favorite Bible stories is the Old Testament narrative about a baby boy whose life was saved by three brave women—the King of Egypt's daughter and the boy's sister and mother. "It is with the complicity of three women that Moses survived," Beanzoui said. "All three contributed morally, spiritually, and intellectually to the education of Moses."

Beanzoui (pronounced ben-ZWAH) visited the Women of the ELCA churchwide offices in Chicago last summer to talk about her September 26, 2004, ordination as a Lutheran pastor in the Central African Republic (C.A.R.). She is only the second woman to be ordained by Lutherans in that region. Her bright gold African dress and quiet demeanor seemed to reflect the call she has chosen to

answer—a bold career in a country where men hold most authority, with the calm strength a woman brings to the ministry.

Beanzoui's achievements—like those of the women in the Exodus story—give good reason to lift up International Women's Day March 8, an annual event first celebrated in 1911 in Germany, Austria, and Denmark. Since the early twentieth century, the event has come to represent causes ranging from peace to women's rights (see sidebar).

Even as Beanzoui was on the cusp of ordination, she wondered if she was making the right career choice. "I still have some doubts sometimes when I think about this vocation I am entering into. This path can come from within one's self, but it can also be pushed by the community around you."



*Antoinette Beanzoui*

Beanzoui spent a month last summer visiting C.A.R. companion synods of Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast, Western North Dakota, and Eastern North Dakota. Her message to the women she met was this: "The woman is life. It is women who give and preserve life. So, it is important for us to constrain the



great problems we face in this world and seek how to preserve the life of our children. We must engage this world and combat all those great challenges that influence our children.”

While Beanzoui was studying at university and seminary in the C.A.R., she and her husband, Felix (who was ordained a Lutheran minister the same day as his wife), were raising four children. She then adopted the four children of her late brother, a common practice in Africa. Completing a master’s degree in theology while raising eight children would seem an

insurmountable obstacle to most women, yet Beanzoui names as her main challenge being accepted as “a woman doing ministry”—traditionally a man’s role. “The challenges and difficulties will be great, but that only reinforces that the example of the way I live my life is of the most importance.”

Beanzoui marked the 2003 completion of a decade of study by beginning her career as professor of Christian education and New Testament at the Theological Institute for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the C.A.R. Her true passions are practical theology,

helping young people discover their ministry, and serving as a model for women who seek to serve God and the church.

“It is a great opportunity for me to be a teacher where I can focus on men and women who are studying church leadership and also on the spouses of the students,” she said, speaking in her native French through a translator. “This is where I could bring about not just good quality education, but be a good example to them.” Role models are important to Beanzoui; she names her mother as her most powerful influence.

**2005 Global Mission Events** “Gathered by God’s Grace for the Sake of the World” is the theme of the 2005 Global Mission Events, which are scheduled July 14-17 at North Dakota State University in Fargo and August 25-28 at the Baltimore (Maryland) Convention Center.

At every GME, a lively mix of worship, music, art, workshops, food, and fellowship brings to life God’s mission around the world. ELCA mission personnel and international guests share stories of ministries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe, and the Middle East. Global and domestic concerns are addressed during challenging workshops (or Global University sessions).

Special programs are offered for children ages three to 10, and young people junior high, and high school age. Childcare is provided for children through age two. For more information (or to register when available), contact the Division for Global Mission at 800-638-3522, extension 2642, or visit on-line ([www.elca.org/gme](http://www.elca.org/gme)).



"I have referred to my mother as my role model in all things I have written. My mother is very passionate and courageous, strong and open. She has always encouraged me in my work."

Beanzoui calls herself an "optimistic woman," despite the political unrest in her country, and

she feels she has much to offer younger people. "Women have the ability to do anything," she said. Like the three biblical female characters who stepped away from the safe and familiar to save the life of Moses, Beanzoui believes women must courageously accept the assignments God gives them, no

matter how challenging. "God used Moses to liberate his people, but it was those three women who nurtured him and formed him into a leader. It is our job, too, to form our future leaders."

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**Terri Lackey is managing editor of *Lutheran Woman Today*.**

**Origins of International Women's Day** Women have been fighting for equal rights and peace for a long, long time. In ancient Greece, Athenian women who were tired of war initiated sexual strikes to force their husbands to vote for peace with Sparta. During the French Revolution in the late 1700s, the women of Paris marched on the royal court at Versailles to demand liberty and equality. Around 1848, women gathered in Seneca Falls, N.Y., for the first American women's rights convention. There they outlined their goals, which included the demand to vote in political elections. In 1920, more than 70 years later, they finally won that right.

Now, women have their own day—International Women's Day—observed March 8 and counted as a national holiday in many countries. The idea took root at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1911, German socialist Klara Zetkin and Russian revolutionary and feminist Aleksandra Kollontai organized the first official International Women's Day (IWD) to observe women's rights movements in several countries and to help achieve universal suffrage. As it gained momentum, IWD took on the cause of peace. It was observed in the U.S. until the late 1920s, but lost steam until the 1960s when it was revived during the women's movement. In 1975, the United Nations—an organization known for supporting women's rights—began sponsoring IWD.

Most of the above information was taken from the United Nations Web site ([www.un.org/events/women/iwd/2004/](http://www.un.org/events/women/iwd/2004/)).



**COME JOIN US AT THE SIXTH TRIENNIAL GATHERING IN SAN ANTONIO,  
TEXAS, JULY 5-10, 2005** We can think of no better way to spend five days—can you?



**Act boldly.**

**EMBRACE** all that you are as a Christian woman

**ENJOY** fellowship with other women

**EXALT** God in song, dance, worship, and Bible study

**EXPERIENCE** this dynamic gathering that can change your life!

**JOIN THOUSANDS OF WOMEN ON A PERSONAL JOURNEY OF SPIRITUAL REJUVENATION AND  
SELF-AWARENESS. GATHER A GROUP OF GOOD FRIENDS AND PUT ON YOUR WALKING SHOES—  
WE'RE GEARING UP FOR SOME TEXAS-SIZE EXCITEMENT!**

There will be plenty to do at the Sixth Triennial Gathering. Join one or more of the following activities:

Educational explorations through workshops and miniversities (Continuing Education Units available—  
see registration materials for details)

A fundraising walk-a-thon, sponsored by the ELCA Board of Pensions

Inspiration time—a setting for prayer, Bible study, song, and dance

Keynote speaker Barbara Ehrenreich, essayist and author of 12 books

Shopping at The Dwelling Place, the exhibit hall, filled with informational booths and retailers

New opportunities to fellowship and learn from women who share your interests and passions

The Great Banquet, a gala closing dinner

And much, much more

Registration opened February 1.

Visit our Web site at [www.womenoftheelca.org](http://www.womenoftheelca.org) for registration information and  
updates or call 800-638-3522 ext. 2730 for pre-printed registration materials.

**WOMEN OF THE ELCA'S SIXTH TRIENNIAL GATHERING  
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS, JULY 5-10**

Women <sup>of the</sup> **ELCA**



## Seeds of Hope

by Kirsi Stjerna

**OUR FAMILY ALWAYS HAS SEVERAL JARS OF "SEEDING" SEEDS ON THE KITCHEN COUNTER. SIX-YEAR-OLD KRISTIAN COLLECTS SEEDS BECAUSE HE IS FASCINATED** by them. He finds them in most vegetables and fruits and wants to plant them all someday. When he grows up, he says he wants to plant seeds full time. He is mesmerized by life and the knowledge that, once upon a time, he was just a tiny seed.

Easter is a good time to talk about seeds and life.

Growing up in Finland, instead of receiving baskets of candy from a bunny, we had a tradition of planting grass seed for Easter. Each of us got a pack of tiny seeds and a plate of soil. Our job was to plant, water, and nurture the seedlings so that we would have beautiful green grass by Easter Sunday. Though it took me a while to figure out the Jesus connection, the traditions we practiced as children prepared a way for us to grasp the profoundness of celebrating new life.

Convinced of the power of such traditions, our family celebrates Easter with baskets of eggs to remind us of the miracle of life and the life-giving powers of our Creator, who is more powerful than any hardship or even death. We speak of the hope that, in the words of Julian of Norwich, "all will

be well." That hope exists not because of the Easter bunny, but because of the Child of God, Jesus.

Kristian's fascination with seeds has to do with his curiosity about life, how things come to be, and how things die . . . and what happens after. Just like the rest of us, he wants to know if there is an order to our existence and if there is hope for life after death. His questions

"Do children create grown-ups or the other way round?" or "Is it possible that the youngest person in the family can die first?" are the verbal expressions of his cerebral grappling.

Children do worry about the future. They worry about change, death, and loss. They want





assurance that they will be okay, no matter what. Their questions open discussions that can plant spiritual seeds and give them a positive outlook on life. Figuring out the source of hope and life's meaning is part of their spiritual development. Making the most of seeds and Easter eggs as symbols of new life and hope and integrating other ways to remember Jesus' never-ending participation in our lives has lasting effects.

Kristian is pondering continuity and change. Every now and then he looks into the future and assures me, "I don't have to get married; I can stay with you forever." But then, "If I do get married, then you will have grandchildren." He is trying to picture a future with the continuity of his mother being part of his life, while already knowing there will be changes ahead.

Sometimes he ponders changes that are very big. Other times, the little changes cause him consternation. One of the most profound statements my little thinker made was at the breakfast table last Christmas. When I asked him why he refused to eat his all-time favorite, traditional Finnish rice porridge, he replied, "Mother, things change!"

How right he is. Children experience so many changes in their early years. They see themselves physically change and they witness changes in life around them—all without having any control.

Kristian has seen many changes, many endings, and many beginnings. He has seen death; he has also seen life. He would like things to remain the same because it feels safer. And yet, he often must face new realities. His favorite pet is buried in our backyard; he can no longer stay home all day, but must attend school. His parents live in two homes. He is losing his baby teeth. He must sleep in his own bed. His best friend just moved away. His grandfather is dead.

Watching my children deal with changes in their lives—the big and the small—leaves me in awe of the skills humans have to rebirth themselves, to adjust to new circumstances, and to find *something* that sustains them. On Easter, we hold on to that *something*, that hope and promise of rebirth and life after death.

Our losses help us hear the Easter message of new life in real ways. That message enables us to endure our sorrows. In our family, we are learning to live without a person dear to us, my father. Through our grief, my son has developed an Easter theology, which he shares with me frequently: "Don't be sad, Mom. Your dad is dead but he will always live in your heart. And one day we will see him." That conviction is at the base of his developing spirituality and his view of the God of Easter. He firmly believes that God is in our heart and thus everywhere, like the air we breathe. Every now and then, it is as if he embraces the air, taking a deep breath, saying "Hello, God," or "Hello, Grandpa." The knowledge that Grandpa is with God and that they both are near us all the time brings Kristian comfort and hope. As a sign of affection to God, and Grandpa, he likes to plant seeds. The growing seeds support his conviction that life continues.

Easter is one of those times we give ourselves permission to pause and think of the changes—the deaths and resurrections—in our lives. Easter is a good time to breathe in God and take to heart the life-giving promise. Easter is a good time to plant seeds.

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**Kirsi Stjerna is associate professor of Reformation church history at Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, Pa., and a member of Christ Lutheran Church, Gettysburg.**



## **Give All This Day Their Daily Bread** (page 6)

Bring hope to those who hunger or who have been in a disaster. Gifts to the ELCA World Hunger ([elca.org/hunger/](http://elca.org/hunger/)) and Disaster Appeal may be sent through Women of the ELCA, P.O. Box 71256, Chicago, IL 60694-1256. Make checks payable to "Women of the ELCA," then write "World Hunger" or "Disaster Relief" on the memo line. By offering your financial support in this way you highlight the impact of women in supporting the ministries of the church. Questions about your gifts through Women of the ELCA? Call Vanessa at 800-638-3522, ext. 2702.

Visit the ELCA advocacy page ([elca.org/advocacy/](http://elca.org/advocacy/)) and learn how to voice your concerns or issue compliments to your elected representatives through e-mail.

## **Answering the Call:**

### **C.A.R. Woman Engages World** (page 12)

The Division for Global Missions (DGM) has provided international scholarships to more than 600 people since 1988. The program works with ELCA companion churches around the world to develop leaders for the church. Many scholarship recipients have become important leaders in the church, both in their home countries and globally. Visit the ELCA International Scholarship Program Web site ([elca.org/globalmission/policy/scholar.html](http://elca.org/globalmission/policy/scholar.html)) for more information.

### **2005 Global Mission Events**

"Gathered by God's Grace for the Sake of the World" is the theme of the 2005 Global Mission Events, which are scheduled July 14-17 at North Dakota State University in Fargo and August 25-28 at the Baltimore (Maryland) Convention Center. For more information, contact Division for Global Mission at 800-638-3522, ext. 2642, or visit on-line ([elca.org/gme](http://elca.org/gme)).

## **Bookmarks: Getting By?** (page 20)

*Nickel and Dime: On (Not) Getting By in America*, by Barbara Ehrenreich (Henry Holt and Company, 2001).

Ehrenreich, a noted author and journalist, often uses her craft to tackle tough issues that face women today. A longtime advocate for social justice and economic self-sufficiency for women, Ms. Ehrenreich will be the keynote speaker at the Women of the ELCA's Sixth Triennial Gathering in San Antonio, Texas, July 5-10, 2005. You can order her books at on-line or local bookstores.

*Women Who Changed the Heart of the City: The Untold Story of the City Rescue Mission Movement*, by Delores Burger (Kregel Publications, 1997; [gospelcom.net/kregel](http://gospelcom.net/kregel))

*Victorious Woman! Shaping Life's Challenges into Personal Victories* by Annmarie Kelly (Optimal Living Press, January 2005; [victoriouswoman.com](http://victoriouswoman.com))

## **Welcoming the Stranger:**

### **Handprints on our Hearts** (page 26)

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) resettles refugees, protects unaccompanied refugee children, advocates for fair and just treatment of asylum seekers, and seeks alternatives to detention for those who are incarcerated during their immigration proceedings. Since 1939, LIRS has worked in partnership with a national network of affiliates, congregations, and volunteers. Find out more on-line ([lirs.org](http://lirs.org)).

## **The Gospel with Work Gloves On:**

### **Going Where Help is Needed** (page 28)

Since 1945, Lutheran World Relief has distributed more than 21 million quilts to impoverished countries around the world. Now the LWR quilt has grown from a tangible example of our work to also a symbol of the multi-faceted mission and ministry of Lutheran World Relief. Learn more about the LWR Community Quilt by calling 800-LWR-LWR-2 or on-line ([lwr.org/cq](http://lwr.org/cq)).



## When Disaster Strikes: Awash in God's Love

(page 30)

The mission of Lutheran Disaster Response is "to bring healing and hope to those who have been affected by disaster." Lutheran Disaster Response is concerned with the whole person—the physical, the emotional, and the spiritual. Find out more on-line ([elca.org/disaster](http://elca.org/disaster)).

## Grace Notes: Celebrating Women's Day (page 41)

The United Nations' Web site offers WomenWatch ([www.un.org/womenwatch](http://www.un.org/womenwatch)), a resource for learning more about women and world issues. The news and highlights section offers more of the issues that women around the globe face on International Women's Day 2005.



Wouldn't it be nice to invest in your grandchild's education — and your faith? Well, that's just what you can do at the Mission Investment Fund. We offer a wide array of great investment opportunities, including MissionFuture4KIDZ, an appealing way to save money for college, a birthday gift, a baptismal. We also offer opportunities of another kind: With your investments, we make loans to new and existing congregations, plus to social service agencies to help those in need. For almost 100 years, we've been helping families build their wealth, while helping the church build its future. We're the Mission Investment Fund — the only investment fund for individuals that's a ministry of the ELCA.

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# Getting By?

by Gayle Aldrich

**I IMAGINE THAT BEING ALONE AND NOT HAVING A ROOF OVERHEAD OR FOOD ON THE TABLE IS ONE OF** the most frightening feelings one can experience. How awful it must feel to be forced to give up your home, despite your efforts to get a higher-paying job because the minimum wage just isn't cutting it.

A growing number of Americans are finding it difficult to afford shelter and food while working full-time jobs (and often more than one). The struggle is more challenging because affordable housing and minimum wages do not line up. Jobs that offer fair wages and adequate health insurance are increasingly rare.

What can we do to make ourselves more aware of the plight of women caught in a system that oppresses? Well, we can start by looking to the Bible. There are a great number of verses in the Bible that talk about money. In the areas where Scriptural reference may not address specific questions, God gave us the ability to think, reason, learn, and act compassionately. The following books have been helpful to me as I've sought to gain insight and understanding in a society where paycheck and fairness often do not meet.

*Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*, by Barbara Ehrenreich (Henry Holt and Company, 2001)

In *Nickel and Dimed* you will read a fascinating story by Barbara Ehrenreich, a journalist with a doctorate in biology, who hid her identity as she left her comfort

zone and put herself in the shoes of a minimum-wage worker. She wanted to discover how anyone could survive, let alone prosper, on six to seven dollars an hour.

Ehrenreich established ground rules to provide realistic boundaries during her three-month experiment. First, she would not rely on her educational and personal skills; instead, she would play the role of an unskilled worker. Second, she would take the highest-paying job she was offered and do all she could to keep that job. Finally, she would find the least expensive living accommodations with a reasonable level of safety and privacy.

The objective was to find a place to live, find a job, work, and attempt to make ends meet. She spent a month each in Key West, Florida; Portland, Maine; and the St. Paul/Minneapolis area in Minnesota. Among other low-paying positions, she worked as a waitress, a maid, a house cleaner, a nursing home assistant, and a Wal-Mart clerk. At every turn she found she needed an enormous amount of physical, mental, and emotional stamina to keep going. She found out that she was just as capable of learning a new job as she was capable of messing it up.

At the end of her experiment, she concluded that something was enormously wrong when a healthy single person willing to work hard could barely pay for housing, food, and transportation to and from work. It didn't take her Ph.D. to figure out that minimum wages are too low and rents too high.

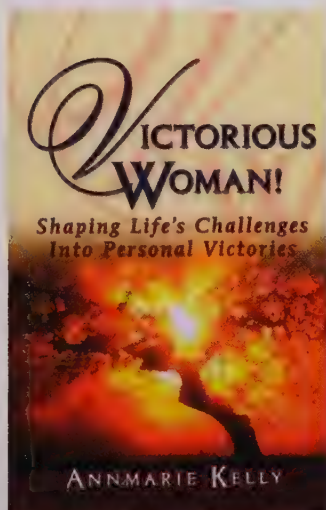
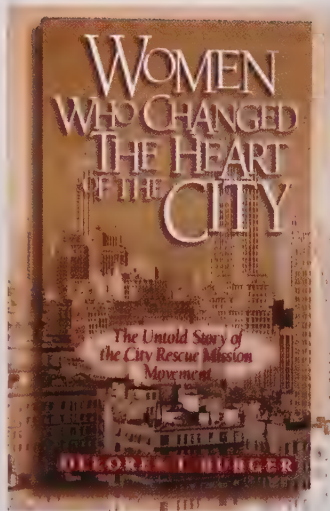


Housing cost increases have outpaced wage increases, creating a dangerous gap that many teeter on the brink of daily. I highly recommend this *New York Times* bestseller.

### FURTHER READING

*Women Who Changed the Heart of the City: The Untold Story of the City Rescue Mission Movement*, by Delores T. Burger (Kregel, 1997)

This book offers biographical sketches of heroes and role models (18 women and one man) involved in the City Rescue Mission Movement. Beginning in the 1800s, the power of faithful people who dedicated their time to social work and helping those less fortunate began to take hold. Call it crazy or miraculous, these heroes went the second, third, and fourth mile to minister to people who were about to give up on life. Like shepherds



feeding the flock, these people found those who needed tending to and lifted them out of the mire, giving them new hope and direction.

*Victorious Woman! Shaping Life's Challenges into Personal Victories* by Annmarie Kelly (Optimal Living Press, 2005)

Connecting, relating, and sharing are all pieces to the puzzle of success. As women, each of us finds different challenges and ambitions. But we also have the ability to encourage one another in ways only women can. This is not to suggest that I support the good old girls' club any more than I support the good old boys' club, but I do believe there's a time and place where it's appropriate to be encouraged and fulfilled by others of our own gender. Join a victory team or start your own.

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**Gayle Aldrich is a writer and marketing specialist who lives and works in Minneapolis, Minn.**

## OFFICIAL NOTICE SIXTH TRIENNIAL CONVENTION

Notice is hereby given that the Sixth Triennial Convention of Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America will be held at the Henry B. Gonzales Convention Center, San Antonio, Texas, July 5-10, 2005.

Delegate registration will begin on Tuesday, July 5, 2005 at 10:00 a.m. (Central Daylight Savings Time.) Delegates are expected to travel on Tuesday, July 5, 2005. All delegates are expected to attend orientation on Wednesday, July 6, 2005 at 3:00 p.m. The first business plenary session begins at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, July 6, 2005.

Everyone is encouraged to join delegates and other Women of the ELCA to "Act Boldly" at the Sixth Triennial Convention of Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Visit [www.womenoftheelca.org](http://www.womenoftheelca.org) for Triennial Gathering and Convention updates and information.

Kathy Schnierle, Secretary  
Women of the ELCA  
Churchwide Executive Board







# THE LEAST OF THESE

by Barbara Berry-Bailey

**After packing the last article of clothing into my daughter's duffle bag, I flopped on the sofa and propped up my feet in satisfaction. She had been talking about this outdoor education overnighter since school began in August.**

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**S**he wanted to pack the really cute pair of pajamas, but the weather reports warned of frost. No, I decided, so the yellow fleece sleep sack got packed. I made the switch after she went to bed. I might not win the Mom of the Year Award, but the mental picture in the little thought bubble above my head of her shivering in the cold Wisconsin woods told

me I made the right choice. Enduring the inconveniences of outdoor living—rain, burnt food, latrines, pumping water, starting fires—builds character. Shivering in the cold all night, however, is beyond mere inconvenience. With that thought, my mind wandered, and I began to think about how homeless people make it from one day to next, especially when the

weather reports warn of frost, snow, or wind.

I recalled a song by pop musician Phil Collins that used to be played many times a day on radio stations across the country. Its lyrics described the situation between the haves and the have-nots: *"She calls out to the man on the street, 'Sir, can you help me? It's cold, and I've nowhere to sleep. Is there somewhere*



# WHERE ARE WE IN ALL THIS? DO WE GET IT?

*you can tell me?" He walks on, doesn't look back; he pretends he can't hear her. Starts to whistle as he crosses the street; seems embarrassed to be there."* Remember that song? Have you ever seen that woman?

## No excuses for not getting it

For many of us, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus is one we would rather not think too much about. Perhaps it is because the parable divides rich from poor, feast from famine, us from them. Perhaps it is because we are uncomfortable with our own plenty. When trying to understand a parable, we do not analyze the whys or wherefores of every element. A parable is a story told to make a point; a single principle comes to bear, and a single moral is deduced. The rich man ate; Lazarus starved. The rich man was healthy; Lazarus was so sick that he could not shoo away the

dogs. The rich man was living it up inside his luxurious compound and did nothing to alleviate the suffering of Lazarus who was barely alive outside the gate.

If in an attempt to be fair, we set aside the meaning of the parable to analyze the rich man's situation, he is still convicted. He knew Lazarus by name, and he knew of Lazarus' station in life—a low-life have-not. After the rich man dies and is tormented in Hades, he believes Lazarus should cater to his needs. Even in Hades, this clueless, nameless rich man does not get it.

Where are we in all this? Do we get it? What do we do about the hungry ones we see, whether they are on the street or on our Sunday worship bulletin covers? Some of us opt to look away or order our lives in such a way as to avoid seeing them altogether. But, by doing so, we are choosing to be clueless. However, according

to the parable, not getting it is no excuse.

## A dollar and a prayer

There was this old woman beggar who used to stand at the entrance to my subway station in Washington. Every day, I would walk past her. I could see her pale, wrinkled face beneath the stocking cap that covered most of her white hair. In the winter, she wore short boots and a knee-length coat. I am certain her legs were always cold. I remember wondering, "How did she end up like this? Did she not have children to take care of her? Did she neglect or abuse them and now this was her punishment?" She was there *every* day, and every day I would silently wonder about her. Then, one day, she wasn't there. And that scared me because my silent questions did nothing to help her. When I would walk past where she usually stood at the entrance of the Foggy Bottom

station, I was keenly aware of the empty space. She was definitely “the least of these” for whom I did nothing but walk by and wonder.

Then, weeks later, she was there again as if she had never been absent, standing in the same place. This time I looked in her eyes, not just at her hat or her hair or her coat. I could have asked her name, talked to her, and learned her story, but I did not. I was too caught up in my Washingtonian lifestyle and appearances to do that. But I gave her a dollar that day and every day thereafter until I took a job in another city. I do not know her name, which is why during my intercessory prayer, I pray for those “whose names we do not know.”

### Teaching the world to fish

Truisms are complicit in our inaction: “Give a man a fish; you have fed him for today. Teach a man to fish, and you have fed him for a lifetime.” We can even proof-text our lack of involvement by using Scripture, dragging

Jesus into it so that we might feel better. After all, didn’t Jesus say, “The poor will always be with you”? So maybe we could just drop spare change in the small box at the checkout counter. But even as we show our credit card to pay for our week’s worth of groceries, we know deep down that those quarters dropped in the box would not stretch far enough to feed the few people living in our own home. How, then, could it feed the starving multitudes?

Jesus was faced with hordes of outstretched hands begging for help and expecting to be healed. The word “many” is used numerous times to describe the multitude of people who approached Jesus for help or healing of some kind. In Matthew we are told that “many crowds” came to him for healing, and Jesus cured them all! Now, there are *many* in just one crowd; Jesus faced many crowds. Even Jesus, who gave, fed, and cured, must have felt overwhelmed at times.

However, unlike Jesus, we simply cannot give to every individual who comes up to us and asks for a handout. There are no easy answers. But if you are a part of the solution, that is, if you are involved some way in teaching hungry people to fish, you might find some peace and sense of balance when you encounter the hungry.

A dollar a day will go a long way to feed hungry people all over the world. If everyone reading this article right now would pledge to give \$365 to the World Hunger Appeal, that money could feed hungry children not only “over there” but “right here” as well. A domestic hunger grant through a congregation could feed an old beggar woman at the Foggy Bottom Metro station.

You may not be able to heal and feed them all, but you can do something about some of the ones right at your gate or subway stop.

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**Rev. Barbara Berry-Bailey serves as associate director for worship at the ELCA churchwide office.**

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**But even as we show our credit card to pay for our week’s worth of groceries, we know deep down that those quarters dropped in the box would not stretch far enough to feed the few people living in our own home. How, then, could it feed the starving multitudes?**



**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The following articles profile some of the work done by Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, Lutheran World Relief, and ELCA Domestic Disaster Response and Lutheran Disaster Response. While these glimpses offer only a sample of the work done by each agency, it is our hope that they will inspire and engage you to find out more about these and other Lutheran ministries.

# MINISTRIES OF HOPE

## THREE LUTHERAN AGENCIES THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE



**B**earing coats, hats, mittens, boots, and a beaming smile, Judy Dirks expertly navigates her way to Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport. She knows the way well after 28 years of welcoming refugees from around the world to their new homes in Northfield, Minnesota.

Dirks' willingness to welcome the stranger in Jesus' name has

brought untold blessings to her life. "Matthew 25:32-40 has been a real inspiration to me. I couldn't imagine what it must be like to be in a different country with a different language," she said. "I knew of these verses before, but now I know what Jesus means."

Refugees have been forced to flee their homes and countries because of persecution for their

faith, political views, membership in a social group, national origin, or race. Perhaps they walked for days across mountains or deserts or risked a dangerous boat trip to another country. Always, they are looking for safety and a place of refuge. Dirks volunteers alongside the staff of Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota, one of 26 affiliates of



Judy Dirks, lower right, with the Quach family.

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS), assisting refugee families in building new lives with support from congregations and individuals in their new communities.

In 1975, Dirks helped form the Northfield Refugee Committee, an ecumenical coalition of ten congregations that sponsors refugee families for resettlement. The committee has sponsored several families over the years, finding housing for them, stocking kitchens, making meals, seeking employment opportunities, arranging medical appointments, teaching English, and building lifelong friendships across cultures and faiths. Dirks has stories of weddings, graduations, family gatherings, baptisms, and funerals that reveal the deep bonds she has

formed with her friends from across the globe. "We can call on each other now and talk about what's happening. We're just really close friends."

Starting a new life in a new land is never easy for those who have fled their homelands. Refugees often come with only the clothes on their backs and weariness in their eyes. They wonder who will help them learn about this new culture. Will there be schools for their children? Where will they work? What will they eat? Since 1975, Dirks has been at the airport to meet every refugee family the committee has helped. "I was so afraid there would be no one there to meet them. I didn't want them to be afraid. I wanted them to feel welcome."

"I have strong feelings of pride for them," she said of the many refugees she has come to know. "They have faced incredible challenges in coming to the United States to live. They have overcome these challenges and have gone on to become successful, whether that means graduating from college or working in a factory. Our adult refugees work so hard to learn English and become citizens as soon as they are eligible, and then they buy homes as soon as they are financially able. I sometimes question whether I would persevere

as well as they do here if I had to live in another country so very different from my own."

Dirks, who is a member of the Ambassadors Circle (LIRS's corps of trained volunteer representatives), speaks regularly to Women of the ELCA groups about the joys of refugee resettlement and of being a congregational co-sponsor of a refugee family. "It has extended into other areas of my life now, and I'm now vice-chair of the Northfield Human Rights Commission," she said. "I also get to meet more Northfield women at other churches because they become involved. Now total strangers will call me with something to donate or questions about other cultures. Even students at St. Olaf, the local Lutheran college, are told to call me with questions. It has given me a rich, full life."

The meaning of life has taken on new dimensions for Dirks. "I think about these new friends, female and male, refugees and immigrants, some I see often, and some I do not see as often any more. I realize that they have all left handprints on my heart, truly."

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**Denise Peterson is the director for congregational and community outreach with Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service.**



## MINISTRIES OF HOPE THREE LUTHERAN AGENCIES THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE



### The Gospel with Work Gloves On:

by Brenda Meier **GOING WHERE HELP IS NEEDED**

**T**heresa Druery and a group of women from Luther Memorial Church, Baltimore, Maryland, spend their Wednesday mornings pinning together quilt pieces. “We go in to the church about 9:30 or 10 in the morning, eat breakfast, and start working,” she said. “We don’t talk much until lunchtime because I’m bound and deter-

mined to get 10 to take home with me every week.”

Even with failing eyesight, Druery, 85, is the group’s official sewer. She takes the pinned quilt pieces and uses her half-century-old Kenmore to sew them together throughout the week. “Sometimes it takes me a while to thread the needle, but I feel like this is what God called

me to do. I’ve been given the hands to do it with.”

Druery, who doesn’t even own a quilt herself, said fellow group members Martha Cielsa, Madeline Wagerman, Betsy Creamens, and Doris Lawrence make about 100 quilts a year for Lutheran World Relief, delivering them to the warehouse in New Windsor, Maryland. “They

were making quilts before I got to this church 12 years ago,” Drury said, “but I got them up to 100.”

For many, Lutheran World Relief (LWR) is synonymous with quilts. In its 60-year history, the organization has provided more than 21 million quilts for people in need. But it is about far more than that. LWR was started in the wake of World War II when about one-fifth of the world’s Lutherans were left homeless. Lutheran churches in the U.S. mobilized to send aid to their German and Scandinavian kin in war-torn Europe.

Shortly after, American Lutherans realized aid was needed beyond Europe, and LWR started helping people in the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Service to all suffering people—through programs that improved lives and communities—became a vital part of the organization’s Christian witness. Now, LWR partners are often at the scene of a disaster well before the world notices and long after newspapers quit making headlines out of it.

The quilt has grown from a tangible example of LWR’s work to a symbol of the multi-faceted mission and ministry of Lutheran World Relief. Here are some of the ways it reaches out:

**Children:** Provides education for 43,000 refugee children in Kenya, and training in childhood nutrition for village health workers in India.

**Education:** Offers vocational training for AIDS orphans in Uganda, and conflict resolution and leadership training for teenagers in the West Bank.

**Environment:** Promotes woodless house construction in Mali, and trains farmers in soil and water conservation in Nicaragua.

**Food:** Teaches people to grow kitchen gardens in Niger, and increases organic farming methods in Bolivia.

**Health:** Helps build health clinics in Mali, and trains community health workers in remote villages in Nepal.

**HIV/AIDS:** Mobilizes congregations to care for people affected by AIDS in Kenya, and oversees the first voluntary and confidential counseling and testing center in Niger.

**Justice:** Helps people obtain legal documents such as birth and marriage certificates in Burkina Faso and Bolivia, and secures land titles for farmers in the Philippines.

**Peace:** Helps churches become peace sanctuaries in Colombia, and brings together warring factions and community leaders in peace-building efforts in Sudan.

**Relief:** Provides food, water, and shelter to refugees in Sudan, and distributes quilts and layettes and health, school, and sewing kits around the world.

**Water:** Digs wells in Mali, and catches rainwater during the monsoon season in India.

**Women:** Hosts women’s rights seminars in Tanzania, and teaches women how to read and write in India.

**Work:** Provides computer classes and job placement services for young people in the West Bank, and teaches coffee farmers how to diversify their livelihoods through eco-tourism in Nicaragua.

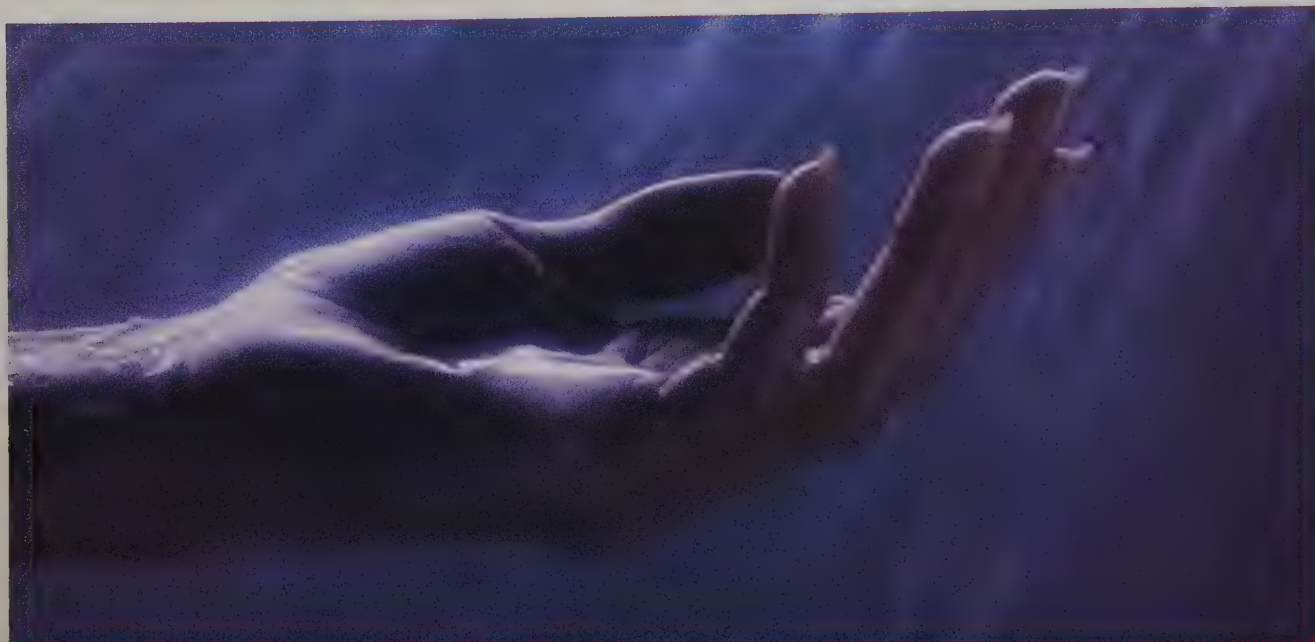
Some call Lutheran World Relief the “gospel with work gloves on.” Through it, U.S. Lutherans put their faith into action by expressing Christian love for their neighbors around the world. As it moves into the future, LWR is well positioned to continue and expand its wide-ranging work.

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**Brenda Meier is the communication associate for parish projects and partnerships at Lutheran World Relief in Baltimore, Md.**



## MINISTRIES OF HOPE THREE LUTHERAN AGENCIES THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE



### When Disaster Strikes:

by Heather Feltman

### AWASH IN GOD'S LOVE

**T**here are satisfying times in life where call perfectly aligns with calling. Such has been the case for me recently as a diaconal minister in the ELCA. The role of a diaconal minister is to lead and equip baptized Christians for service within and beyond the congregation. What an opportunity I have had to live out this call over the past few months as

director of the ELCA Domestic Disaster Response and Lutheran Disaster Response.

Last fall, Lutherans responded to four hurricanes in six weeks through our disaster response programs. A colleague came to me after the fourth one and said, "Wow, who would have thought? This has been baptism by fire for you in your new call."

Baptism by wind and water might have been more accurate! However, my colleague's observation did make me think about how response to those affected by the devastating storms is a reflection of baptism in Christ.

Being claimed by baptism means we are bathed in God's grace and love, and that empowers us to offer help and hope to

people who are grieving or suffering. In fact, the mission of Lutheran Disaster Response is “to bring healing and hope to those who have been affected by disaster.”

I have had the privilege and honor to serve with extraordinary women through our programs. One, Jeannie Percy, a construction worker, put her skills to good use in serving Christ through Lutheran Disaster Response. She said, “I have seen so many homeowners have their faith in God shaken as they have gone through a disaster. Some have never known God. But when volunteers, people they don’t even know, from across the country come to their houses to help with repairs, they ask ‘why?’ That is where the gospel comes to life in the actions of Christians.”

Percy was volunteering with the disaster relief program when Mary, who worked third shift for a cleaning service, was struggling through her own disaster—severe hurricane damage to her home.

Mary would finish her shift each day and then help volunteers with repair work needed on her house. As the project neared completion, Mary’s excitement grew. However, her house had to be raised six feet, which worried Mary. When she was finally able to move back in to her “house in the air,” she felt uncomfortable. Percy stopped by a few days later to see how the move had gone, and Mary was on the porch, visibly distraught. Crying, she told Percy she had stayed at her home on the first night until 11 p.m., “then I started getting afraid. I’ve never been afraid in my home, and I don’t understand.” Mary left her home that night—and subsequent nights—to stay in a place where she felt safer.

As Percy comforted her, she reminded Mary that she was the first one in the neighborhood to return home. It was only natural that she would be anxious for a while; after all, the last night she

had spent there, the hurricane had flooded the house with six feet of water. Percy visited Mary daily for the next two weeks. One Monday when Percy pulled into the driveway, an exuberant Mary greeted her, exclaiming, “I did it! I’ve been here all weekend.”

Percy said she serves in disaster response ministry because “Jesus has reached down to help and lift me up many times in my life, and all Christ asks is that I do likewise for my neighbor. I guess I have a big neighborhood.”

Lutheran Disaster Response is concerned with the whole person—the physical, the emotional, and the spiritual. It is through our baptism that we are able to minister to those affected by disaster and to bring many of them to the church. Thanks be to God.

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**Heather Feltman, diaconal minister, is director of ELCA Domestic Disaster Response and Lutheran Disaster Response.**

**I have had the privilege and honor to serve with extraordinary women through our programs.**





# RICH IN BLESSINGS

by Maryann Cavender Hood

**PSALM 23 OR “THE SHEPHERD’S SONG”** IS OFTEN QUOTED TO COMFORT THOSE LEFT BEHIND WHEN THEIR LOVED ONES DIE. FOR MORE THAN A YEAR, I’VE USED IT TO HELP ME THROUGH THE MOST DIFFICULT TRIAL I’VE EVER FACED—THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

I was born into a poor but happy home. When I was a child, my mother reminded our family constantly that the Creator has given us many things to enjoy, even when situations appear bleak. Early on, when my personal faith was not as strong as it could have been, I still loved God’s Word and sought to serve God in many ways.

Eventually, I learned that I could not earn my salvation by good works and that both salvation and sanctification are God’s free gifts. As my depth of understanding grew, my faith became strong. After a successful teaching career, I sought to spread my Christian faith through my writing. However, after some time, I began to lose interest in this “first love” of mine

and turned to laying up treasures on earth.

When this ultimately proved to be unsatisfying, I found myself becoming concerned with growing old. “Lord,” I pleaded, “I don’t want to grow old and wrinkled.” That’s when that familiar cliché, “The alternative to growing old is dying,” hit home for me. I learned I had pancreatic cancer. Instead of

appearing 10 years younger than my age, I looked a decade older. The pounds fell away quickly.

My earthly treasures were no longer valuable. I realized my folly and began to give away some of my possessions before they rusted away, too. I decided that “laying up treasures in Heaven” was the better way to live.

For me, I perceived this as the Great Shepherd leading me down the path of righteousness. My Shepherd provided a comfortable bed with clean sheets to lie on as my body recovered from pain. Friends and family wrapped me in a comforting blanket of love, showering me with prayers, visits, pretty gowns, flowers, books, and tapes. I felt like I was walking in God’s “green pasture.”

I came to truly understand the phrase “walking through the valley

of the shadow of death” as I faced grave danger several times immediately following my diagnosis of pancreatic cancer in its final stages. To quote my oncologist, I was “just a few days from death” when he first saw me.

After these close calls, his nurse began to call me “Lazarus” because I seemed to have come back from the dead. God reminded me again, “My grace is sufficient for you.” I had no fear and experienced a peace I cannot explain as I approached the chill of death.

I was given a wonderful gift—added months to live—and I rejoice over my blessings. Each morning, my dear husband (who has health problems of his own) prepares a hot breakfast for us and announces, “God has given us another day to enjoy life together.” How we treasure these special times.

An extended life was not my only gift from God. I have told a number of friends that God sends me at least one happy surprise each day. Recently, I told my niece about this, and she said, “Aunt Ann, I have prayed for months that God would send you a happy surprise each day.” What a wonderful Creator we serve!

As I pray, “Lord, bring yourself the most glory possible with my remaining days and be merciful with the pain and nausea,” I realize that God’s angels of “goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

Maryann Cavender Hood is a retired teacher and freelance writer from Gadsden, Ala.



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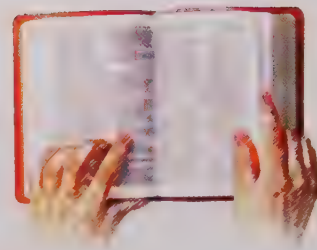


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**Session 7**

# If Someone Rises from the Dead



by Audrey West

## Study text

Luke 16:19–31 (the parable of the rich man and Lazarus)

## Theme verse

“If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.” (Luke 16:31)

## Overview

Depending on one’s perspective, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus is either comforting or challenging. Which is it for the churches in North America? Which is it for your congregation? Which is it for you? In this month’s Bible study we will listen closely to this parable of Jesus to hear the word spoken to us.

## Opening

“Christ, Be Our Light,” verses 1 & 2 (*Renewing Worship Songbook*, #R127)

Text: Bernadette Farrell

Longing for light, we wait in darkness.

Longing for truth, we turn to you.

Make us your own, your holy people,  
light for the world to see.

## Chorus

Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.

Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light! Shine in your church  
gathered today.

Longing for peace, our world is troubled.

Longing for hope, many despair.

Your word alone, has power to save us.

Make us your living voice.

## Chorus

**1. Name a time or event in your life when you belonged to a group. For example, when you belonged to a club, your profession, or any other setting. What were the signs or clues that let you know that you belonged?**

## Hearing the Story

**Read Luke 16:19–31, preferably aloud.** If you are doing this study with a group, you may wish to do a dramatic reading of the parable. Choose a narrator, one person to read the part of the rich man, and one person to read the part of Abraham.

**2. After hearing the story, name something in the parable that is particularly striking to you.**

**Pictures in Opposites**

Most of Jesus’ parables feature characters about whom we are given very little information. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus, however, paints a vivid picture of two men and their situations. This information comes through the narrator’s (Jesus’) introduction of the characters, as well as through the dialogue between Abraham and the rich man. These details allowed Jesus’ first followers to form a vibrant mental image of the parable.

**3. List the details you learn about the rich man and about Lazarus. Be specific, and consider the entire parable. Some examples are given below to help get you started. Notice that many**

**of the details about Lazarus contrast with the details about the rich man. (Include all the details you find, whether or not they contrast.)**

**Taking Time to See**

Parables are stories, not history. They speak their truth in the veiled language of metaphor and allegory or, as some scholars suggest, in riddles. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus is not intended to give a preview of the life to come as much as it seeks to teach us a truth about how to live in the present. Our task is to discern that truth.

Many of the contrasts between the rich man and Lazarus emphasize the economic disparity between the two men, as we see below.

Rich Man	Lazarus
rich	poor
not named	named Lazarus
clothed in purple and linen	covered in sores



### **There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen . . .**

Purple garments were quite expensive in the ancient world due to the cost of producing the dye, which came from the murex, a particular sea snail. Consequently, purple was a sign of wealth and the color of royalty. (The Gospels of Mark and John tell how the soldiers placed a purple robe around Jesus and crowned him with thorns in order to mock him as “king of the Jews”: Mark 15:17–20; John 19:2–5.) If the parable were told today, we might say that the rich man shops at all the best stores and wears designer clothes; no outlet malls for this fellow! He is “dressed to the nines” even as he goes about his daily business. Everybody can tell just by looking at him that he is wealthy and important.

### **. . . and who feasted sumptuously every day.**

The Greek word translated as “feasted” here means “rejoice” or “celebrate.” The same word appears in the parable of the prodigal son: The father kills the fatted calf and they “celebrate” at a big party with plenty of food (Luke 15:23, 24, 29, 32). Jesus uses the same word in a parable about another rich man (the rich fool, Luke 12:16–21), who is so confident in the riches he has stored up for himself that he can “eat, drink and *be merry*” (12:19). The pantry of our rich man is overflowing, enough so that he can feast any time he pleases: “every day,” according to the parable. Gourmet foods, exotic delicacies—only the best for him.

### **And at his gate lay a poor man . . .**

The fact that the rich man has a gate in front of his home is another sign of his wealth. There is a wall around his compound, not unlike the gated communities in some U.S. neighborhoods. Such walls are designed to keep out undesirables, like the poor man in the parable.

Just outside the rich man’s house is a poor homeless man. The rich man would have walked past him every day as he went about his business: This is not a hidden homeless guy, sleeping under the highway overpass or lying in a doorway on the poor side of town. He is right there on the sidewalk in the silk-stocking district, where everybody could see him if they would only stop and look.

The verb translated here as “lay” at the gate actually means “has been thrown,” elsewhere used about throwing worthless salt away (Luke 14:35), or throwing wood into the fire (3:9). It is also used in speaking of a physical disability or of somebody who has been “thrown” by illness onto a sickbed, which is its likely meaning here.

### **. . . named Lazarus**

This is the only time in the Gospels that a character in one of Jesus’ parables is given a name. The name Lazarus comes from the Hebrew name El-azar, which means “God has helped” (Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XIV*, The Anchor Bible [Doubleday: New York, 1985], 1131). With the naming of the poor man, the story becomes much more personal than if all the characters had remained anonymous. The rich man, on the other hand, remains unnamed. He is “everyman,” who represents all of us. Did you notice in 16:24 that the rich man knows Lazarus’ name? He knows him and yet he never does anything to help him while the two of them are still alive.

### **. . . covered with sores**

We do not need to hear much more than this to envision poor Lazarus. The Greek word for the “sores” on Lazarus’ body is the same as the “boils” in the sixth plague prophesied by Moses against Pharaoh in Egypt (Exodus 9:8–11). Lazarus is a man who is suffering,

who hurts all the time. Do the flies land on his sores? Does his clothing stick to his scabs? One wonders about the contrast between the fine purple clothing of the rich man and the painful purple sores covering Lazarus' body.

## WEALTHY DISTRACTION

Tanzania is one of the poorest countries in the world. On a visit to Tanzania in the summer of 2003, an American pastor asked his Tanzanian counterpart, "Why do you think the churches in Tanzania are growing so quickly?"

The Tanzanian Christian responded: "Because Jesus said, 'Blessed are the poor.' In the United States, you can buy what you need, so it is easy to become distracted by your wealth. In Tanzania, we have no money. We can depend on nothing but God."

### ... who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table

Lazarus was homeless and hungry. He would have welcomed just a few crumbs, the leftovers. He's not wishing for much—he doesn't want to take away the rich man's wealth or suggest that the rich man shouldn't enjoy his food. He just wants something to eat, even the scraps from another's feast.

### ... even the dogs would come and lick his sores.

The image is graphic: Stray dogs gather around, licking Lazarus' body. It may be a disgusting image, but it also carries the possibility of multiple meanings. First, a dog with a sore on its own body will often lick it, which serves to

clean it and keep the wound exposed to the air for healing. By licking Lazarus' sores, are the dogs, in a way, ministering to him? Are they doing what the rich man does not do—attend to Lazarus' needs? Second, and at the same time, being licked by dogs is degrading; it serves to emphasize the poor man's suffering. Third, "the dogs" is a metaphor for Gentiles, people who are not Jewish (in much of Scripture, they are outside of the people of God; in today's terms, they might be the unchurched). Could the parable be suggesting that even outsiders (and unclean ones, at that) have more compassion for Lazarus than his Jewish brother, the rich man, does?

**4. In what ways do you or your congregation, like the rich man, have more than enough? In what ways does Lazarus represent aspects of your own life or the life of your congregation? (For example, perhaps you lack something, are in need of comfort, or are an outsider according to someone else's standards.)**

## Destinations in Death

When Lazarus dies, he is "carried away by the angels to be with Abraham" (16:22). The original Greek phrase is "to Abraham's bosom." The specific meaning of this term is difficult to determine, and interpreters have made many suggestions. They agree that Abraham represents the patriarch of the Jews, that is, the common ancestor of the people of God. Being carried to his bosom could represent the idea of joining the ancestors in the afterlife.

Abraham was also a wealthy man known for his hospitality—recall the story in Genesis where he and his wife, Sarah, entertain three strangers who bring God's promise of a son in their old age (Genesis 18:1–15). Being in Abraham's bosom could suggest being an



honored guest who dines while reclining in the place closest to the host, like the beloved disciple in John 13:23.

Whatever it means to be in Abraham's bosom, it is a place of comfort for Lazarus. The poor man who yearned for scraps from the table in life feasts with Abraham in the afterlife.

The rich man, on the other hand, is buried and winds up in Hades. (See sidebar, Going to Hades.) There he is thirsty and tormented; his earthly wealth does him no good here. Hoping to bank on his religious pedigree, he calls out to his ancestor, "Father Abraham!" (16:24). While Abraham acknowledges him as "child," he does nothing to relieve the man's misery. "Remember," Abraham says, "that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony" (16:25).

**5. Why do you think the rich man went to Hades and the poor man went to the bosom of Abraham? That is, on what basis did they receive their respective rewards?**

In life they were separated by a gate; now, in death, they are separated by an impassable chasm (16:26). In the social hierarchy of their culture, the rich man was higher than Lazarus. In the afterlife, their positions are reversed. From his new place down below, the rich man looks "up" to see Lazarus far away at Abraham's side. As Jesus says in Luke 13:28–30, "There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrown out. Then people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God. Indeed, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last."

**6. In your view, what are some of the chasms or barriers that divide people from one another? Some examples might be race, gender, education, wealth, and so on. What do you think the parable is saying about those barriers?**

## GOING TO HADES

Ancient Greek and Hebrew thought had a number of images of the fate of the dead. Hades, the place name used in our parable, signifies the underworld where all the dead await the final judgment. *Hades* is the Greek word used to translate the Hebrew word *Sheol*, which represents the chaos of separation from God. We see the term frequently in the Old Testament (originally in Hebrew but translated into Greek before the time of Jesus). For example, when Jonah prays to God from the belly of the great fish, he says, "out of the belly of Sheol [Greek: Hades] I cried, and you heard my voice" (Jonah 2:2). In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells Peter that he will build his church upon a rock and "the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18).

## GO DEEPER: WEALTH AND POVERTY IN LUKE

Of all the Gospels, Luke has the most to say about wealth and poverty, the rich and the poor. Read the passages listed below and answer this question: **According to Luke's Gospel, what is Jesus' view of wealth and possessions?**

1:53	6:20–21
6:24–25	3:11
4:18	14:12–13
16:13	18:18–25
19:1–9	12:15
12:33	14:33

## REPENTANCE

The rich man wants to send a message to his family so that they will repent. Repentance in Greek is *metanoia*, "a change of mind." But *metanoia* or repentance is more than a change of one's opinion (although it can mean that); it is a change in one's understanding or way of thinking. Repentance is an important theme in Luke's writings and central to the message of Jesus' ministry. Luke mentions repentance almost twice as many times as Matthew, who in turn uses it twice as much as Mark, while the Gospel of John never mentions repentance at all.

Luke's proclamation of the ministry of Jesus is framed by the message of repentance, beginning with John the Baptist, who preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 3:3). Jesus defines his own ministry in terms of repentance (5:32) and he continues the message even after his death and resurrection (24:46–47).

## Moses and the Prophets

"Moses and the prophets" (Luke 16:27–31) is a shorthand phrase for the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament, describing God's covenant with the Jews) and the books of the prophets (also part of the Old Testament). These writings teach God's people how to live in response to God's gracious election, and they include repeated commandments to care for the poor and others who are vulnerable. (See how Jesus speaks of this in Luke 10:25–28, where he responds to a lawyer's question about eternal life.)

"Moses and the prophets" also testifies to God's anointed one (the "Messiah" or "Christ")—to his suffering, death, and resurrection. Jesus mentions this when he joins the two disciples on the road to Emmaus after the resurrection. In their grief, they do not recognize Jesus, but he says to them:

"Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah {or [the Christ]} should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the Scriptures. (Luke 24:25–27; see also Acts 26:22–23; 28:23–24).

We humans can be slow learners when it comes to the things of God!

**7. Read Luke 16:31. For you, is there a difference between having an experience of someone rising from the dead versus hearing the testimony of the scriptures? What are the sorts of experiences that encourage you in your life of faith?**

**8. How is this parable inviting or challenging you to change? How is the parable inviting or challenging the church to change?**

## Closing

Sing verses 3 and 5 of "Christ, Be Our Light"

Longing for food, many are hungry.

Longing for water, many still thirst.

Make us your bread, broken for others,  
shared until all are fed.

*Chorus*

Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.

Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light! Shine in your church  
gathered today.



Many the gifts, many the people,  
many the hearts that yearn to belong.  
Let us be servants to one another,  
signs of your kingdom come.

*Chorus*

### Further Reading

Hultgren, Arland J. *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary*.  
Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2000, pp. 110-117.

## TWO PARABLES IN ONE?

In the early 1960s, several biblical scholars noted that the parable of the rich man and Lazarus could be divided into two distinct parts: The first part (16:19–26) is similar to Egyptian folk parables about the reversal of fortunes in the afterlife. The second part (16:27–31) makes the claim that “Moses and the prophets” are sufficient for knowing God’s will. Both sections of the parable reflect explicitly Jewish themes, and were probably spoken originally to Jewish listeners.

Could it be that each part once existed as a separate parable? Or that the first part was the original parable, and the second part was a later addition (either added later by Jesus, when he spoke the parable in a different setting, or added by his followers as they related Jesus’ teachings to a new audience)? Or perhaps both parts of the parable were always told together.

No one knows for sure, but this parable from Luke’s Gospel still has much to teach the followers of Jesus.

## TWO PARABLES IN ONE?

1. Volunteer at a soup kitchen or homeless shelter.
2. Donate clothing or other goods to a thrift store or shelter.
3. Increase your financial contribution to your congregation or the ELCA World Hunger Appeal.
4. Form a group in your congregation or neighborhood that builds on the resources of the “Voluntary Simplicity” movement.
5. Make a conscious effort to consider whether something is a “want” or a “need” before you buy it. Reduce the amount you spend on “wants” and donate the money you save to the church.
6. Get to know your neighbors—organize a block party for the community around your church.
7. Pray for the world, especially for those who are ill or living in poverty.
8. Pray that God will open our hearts to one another, enabling each of us to overcome external divisions and instead to see one another as children of God.

### Looking ahead

Next month we will find ourselves in the midst of the complex family dynamics of a father and his two sons. Hear again this surprising story about a parent’s incredible generosity in the face of his ill-behaved children. Which one deserves to feast on the fatted calf? You decide! Write your own ending to the parable of the prodigal son, one of the most familiar of Jesus’ parables preserved for us in the Gospel of Luke.



GRACE NOTES

## Celebrating Women's Day

by Linda Post Bushkofsky

**FOR NEARLY A CENTURY, WOMEN ACROSS THE WORLD HAVE CELEBRATED INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY (IWD). TODAY, THE DAY OFFERS US A CHANCE TO** reflect on progress made, to continue our call for change, and to celebrate the courageous and bold acts of ordinary women.

This year IWD marks the tenth anniversary of the International Women's Conference held in Beijing, China, in 1995, the fourth such conference conducted by the United Nations. Sue Edison-Swift, a former managing editor of this magazine who now works with the ELCA Hunger Appeal, attended that 1995 Forum on Women and offers these thoughts.

"At the last moment the venue was moved some 30 miles outside of Beijing, complicating all logistics," said Sue, who indicated that many events surrounding the conference proved strange. "Chinese security police were issued yellow sheets to wrap around the women they were sure would protest naked at the event. We were given a stern warning not to bring a Bible in our suitcase and told that if we were detained we could 'ask to see a U.S. consul after three days.'

"I had a goal: get there and back," Sue explained. "I achieved that goal and much more. Fears of evil, naked protestors, and Bible searches proved unfounded.

"Almost 10 years later I still have vivid memories of the conference," she said, including, "the Sunday I worshiped at the packed Christian Community Church in Beijing, giving 'world communion Sunday' a personal meaning.

"The hundreds of women under a rainbow of umbrellas waiting to get in to the last plenary session, moved indoors because of the rain. A line of policemen formed a human fence separating those who could get into the too-small venue and those who could not. They were clearly frightened, wondering what all these wet, disappointed women would do. Then they found out: an older woman, quickly followed by many more, held her umbrella over the head of one of the policemen."

She continued, "My daughter, Annie, was in her first weeks of high school when I went off to the NGO Forum. Recently she told me what an impact this made on her. 'Whenever I was scared about doing something,' she said, 'I'd think, if Mom could go to China, I can do this.'"

What a fitting comment as we celebrate IWD. Women of the twenty-first century owe so much to the generations of women who have preceded us. And it is precisely because of all that they have done in the past that we are encouraged to move forward and break new ground in this century.

The purpose statement of Women of the ELCA calls us to promote healing and wholeness in the church, the society, and the world. On this International Women's Day gather in your unit or with other women in your congregation and consider how you can work towards that healing and wholeness.

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**Linda Post Bushkofsky is executive director of Women of the ELCA.**





A M E N !

## Spanning the Chasm

by Catherine Malotky

**OH, GOD. IT'S NOT EASY TO BE RICH, ESPECIALLY IN THE NORTH AMERICAN WORLD IN WHICH WE LIVE.**

From this perspective, it's hard to imagine being Lutheran and female and rich. Few of us drape ourselves in diamonds and furs. Few of us have enough money to live without worrying about paying the bills or saving for the future or being good stewards. Most of us are pretty average, it seems.

We wouldn't identify with Lazarus, but it's pretty uncomfortable to think of ourselves as the other character, the rich man you banished to Hades. Yet, if we look beyond our own borders—beyond our family, our community, and our nation—we can't ignore the fact that even the most average of us is far wealthier than we can imagine. We are in the midst of such abundance. It's not just our own wealth, but the bounty of the land around us, the freedom to practice our faith, our vocational opportunities. We are not trapped in a caste system. We can vote for our leaders. We can learn and speak our minds. We are rich beyond imagining.

So, God, we are standing before you with this parable in mind. We know there are people who would be, and sometimes are, happy to eat the crumbs that fall from our tables. And, more often than not, we don't even know they are there. We aren't trying to be insensitive or greedy or self-obsessed. We're just living our lives and trying our best.

So, God, is Hades our future? Will you reject us when Judgment Day arrives? Will we find ourselves

eternally separated from you just because we couldn't make the world better during our lifetimes? It's a sobering thought.

"What goes around, comes around," the saying chides. Certainly that is the story of this parable. But is that really your way, God? How shall we be faithful to you if we also happen to have resources that practically fall into our laps?

To what are we called? Are you calling us in this parable to fill the chasm between "us" and "them" in this world? Do you call us to economic justice, to count our blessings as opportunities to invite Lazarus to join us at the table? And might it be that the table we thought was ours is really yours where all are welcome?

A sobering thought, indeed. It might be very hard, given the world in which we live, to decide how much is enough, and then give away the rest even as we seek to believe that "them" is "us." Perhaps this is our own kind of Hades, this yearning to be faithful when it is so in contrast with "bigger is better." In a context where prosperity is such a primary value, what will it take to make the body of Christ a reality where none of your children are hungry or homeless or without a place at the table?

Fire my yearning for such a world, God. Amen

---

**Catherine Malotky serves the ELCA Board of Pensions as representative to several synods in the Upper Midwest. An ordained pastor, she has also been an editor, teacher, parish pastor, and retreat leader.**



## **Upcoming Issue Themes and Overviews**

### **April**

**Theme:** Lost and Found

**Bible study:** Outrageous Generosity (Luke 15:11-32)  
The Profligate Father

Have you ever received a gift beyond your wildest expectations when you least expected it? Have you ever recovered something dear to you that you thought was gone forever? Elements of our relationship with God are captured in these experiences. How can we respond to God's generosity and live up to our end of the Great Commission?

### **May**

**Theme:** Free to Be Bold

**Bible study:** God Knows What You Need  
(Luke 12:22-30) The Ravens and the Lilies

Life can be fraught with stress and worry. But does God want us to spend our time worrying? Jesus asks, "Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?" But can we really live as the lilies of the field do? How can we free ourselves from the earthly distractions that prevent us from being bold in our lives?

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**Theme:** Act Boldly!

**Bible studies:** Finding My Boldness, Boldness in My Community, and Boldness in the World

This summer we explore how each of us is called to be bold. What does that mean for us as individuals, for our faith communities, and for all of us as part of the global community? And how can we be energized by the examples of our bold sisters, both past and present?

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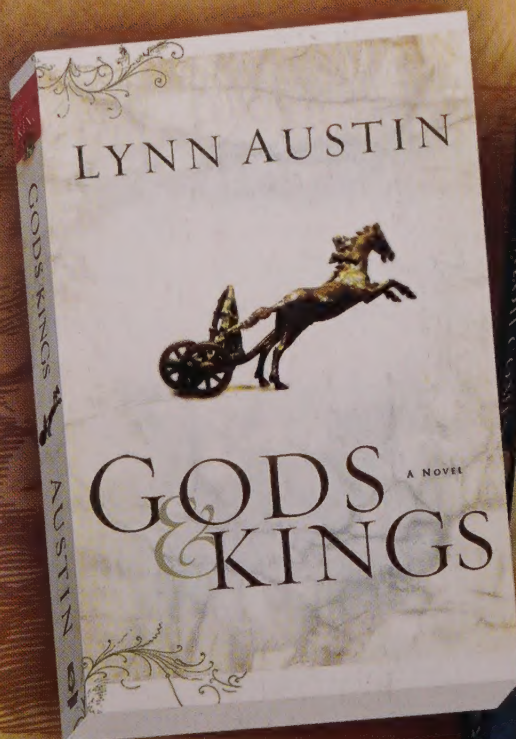
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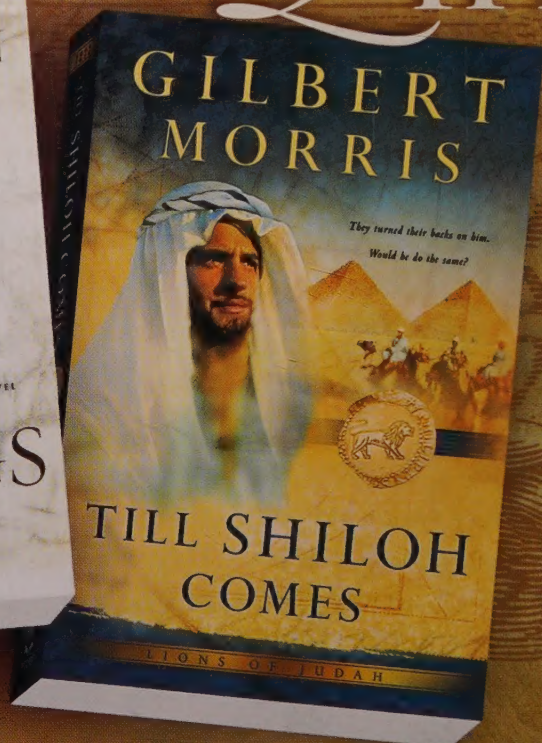
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